

NO MORE TIN CUPS FOR THE BLIND

Myers, Dorice M.

HV1711

m

Myers 3



**M.C. MIGEL LIBRARY  
AMERICAN PRINTING  
HOUSE FOR THE BLIND**



# No More Tin Cups for the Blind

A truly modern project in social work pioneering is described authoritatively by an enthusiastic supporter, DORICE MIRICK MYERS.

SEVENTY-THREE blind persons in Washington, with annual earnings averaging \$3,500—some even topping \$5,000—have shown the way to financial independence and security for thousands of the nation's blind. Gone is their dependence on public and private charity, subsistence doles, and tin cups.

Through the program developed by the Vocational Rehabilitation Service of the Federal Security Agency and the Washington Society for the Blind, these men and women are managing efficiently sixty-four refreshment vending stands, in federal and commercial buildings throughout the District of Columbia. They do an annual business of over a million and a half dollars, employ fifty-two sighted assistants and serve more than a half million customers daily.

For the blind to attempt operation of vending stands is no novelty. Usually, however, lacking supervision and organization, independent blind operators have failed, or, at best, have made extremely low weekly earnings. Application of good business practices which result in high incomes for blind managers is an innovation.

The program of the Washington Society for the Blind, a non-profit, charitable organization, has demonstrated that the blind can operate vending stands efficiently and profitably when "chain store methods," central control techniques, and expert supervision are employed. It has shown, also, that a program sponsoring vending stands for the blind can be entirely self-supporting. Such a program can pay for the necessary supervisory and central control services and at the same time provide funds to expand the opportunities for other blind persons in the community. The Washington Society is believed to be unique among agencies for the blind in that it solicits no donations, subscriptions, or subsidies from any source, and is completely self-sustaining.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Service, now directing the national program for rehabilitation of the blind, estimates that the United States can support 20,000 stands like those operated in Washington, each representing a chance for a blind person to achieve independence and self-respect in his community. More than that, he can provide a good living standard for his family.

To assure a program which would pro-

vide for 20,000 blind persons, it would be necessary that:

Services similar to those offered by the Washington Society for the Blind be available.

Ambitious blind persons of average ability become acquainted with the possibilities of this program when applied to their own communities.

Good locations for vending stands be found.

None of these conditions is insurmountable, once the significance of the program is widely understood.

The ingenious agency control plan, to which the success of the society is largely attributed, is endorsed by the Federal Services for the Blind. It is particularly designed to meet the needs of blind vending stand managers and guarantees to building administrators the installation of attractive and well-managed stands. To customers coming to the building it assures fresh, high quality merchandise and pleasant, efficient service. Thus, the blind managers, well-trained and supervised under the agency control plan, are sure of high net incomes and congenial locations.

The high percent of success of blind persons in these ventures, as compared with their common experience of failure in such small businesses, is its own most impressive testimony. Impressive, too, is the fact that not only are these blind operators able themselves to meet the full cost of the necessary supervision of their stands, but in addition can help finance the continued expansion of the program for the benefit of their blind colleagues. The blind themselves profit most when their opportunities need not be limited by the vagaries of government appropriations, public subscriptions, or allotments from welfare funds.

## Operating Plan

Under the Washington control plan, the local agency which provides fiscal and supervisory services:

1. Owns all the equipment, merchandise, and petty cash of each stand;
2. Designs, maintains, and replaces the equipment;
3. Makes all arrangements for locations, and adjudicates all complaints of building custodians, superintendents, and managers;

4. Provides fire, theft, personal liability, and food poisoning insurance;

5. Supplies full bookkeeping and accounting services;

6. Approves all merchandise to be sold at the stands, as well as all wholesale distributors from whom the merchandise is to be bought;

7. Provides exterminator service;

8. Approves all stand assistants and provides employment and training services for them;

9. Gives a thorough training period to each manager before assigning him to a stand; and

10. Continues training through competent and regular supervision.

The blind manager is placed in business with no investment of his own. He concentrates his attention upon giving his customers top-notch service and superior merchandise. Keeping his stand clean and attractive with eye-catching displays is his responsibility. He sells his merchandise strictly for cash and replenishes his stock by buying from approved wholesalers, also strictly for cash. At the end of each day he makes out a simplified report of all business transactions. Each week, these, with the cash in excess of the petty cash fund, are collected by his supervisor and turned in to the accounting office, where records are kept for each stand. Following the end of each four-week period, the manager receives a detailed statement of his operations with his net profit check for that time.

The blind operator-manager's income is the net profit which he has been able to make during the four-week operating period. This ranges from 10 to 15 percent of his gross sales. The supervisors are constantly studying ways in which to help each manager realize the highest net profit possible for his location. Merchandise surveys are made, management details compared, display arrangement evaluated. Neither the manager nor the supervisor is satisfied until the maximum percent is reached and maintained. In spite of the good results of supervision by the Washington agency, usually two or three managers require particular help from their supervisors to bring their performances in line with accepted high standards of efficient management.

Such supervision serves the blind manager as would his eyes. In overseeing his care and storage of merchandise, ex-



amining his housekeeping in detail, suggesting improvements in his service to customers, the supervisor is, in effect, supplying the manager with sight, supplementing his own managerial ability where assistance is needed.

### Service, Not Sympathy

Supervisors and blind managers know that their stands can succeed only when they offer better service, in more attractive surroundings, than their sighted competitors. Consequently, the Washington Society considers it essential not only to employ highly-qualified, well-paid supervisors but to equip each operator with an especially designed stand installation. Those used in Washington cost approximately \$1,500.

Gratifying by-products of the business-like methods employed by these stands are the resulting attitudes of the public and business associates. Building administrators are glad to have the society's attractive, well-run stands in their buildings. Office workers depend upon the stands for their newspapers, magazines, quick breakfasts, lunches, and snacks. Tradesmen like to do business with them.

Locations for stands need not be limited to rent-free space in federal and state buildings. In Washington, it has been found that blind managers can earn good net incomes and pay reasonable rents to private landlords. In many communities much better paying locations can be found in large office buildings, garages, industrial plants and amusement centers than in public buildings. With an increase in

automobile travel, some highway junction points will make particularly desirable locations.

Blind managers who have enjoyed the improved incomes resulting from the Washington Society's policy are glad to be able to pay the full cost of the services they require. Each stand pays, as part of its operating overhead, an amount ranging from 4 to 6 percent of gross sales, depending on volume. In this way, the costs of operating the program are shared by the stands in proportion to their ability to pay. Ten Washington stands, located in private buildings, paid their managers an average of \$50 a week, carried their full share of administrative expense of the society and, in 1945, built up an expansion fund large enough to equip two additional stands.

The managers appreciate the opportunity for advancement which is open to them under this program. Since no manager owns his own stand, the society and the Vocational Rehabilitation Service can easily promote him. He is free to accept employment in better paying locations as they become available and as rapidly as he has proved his ability to handle a larger business. The standardized design of the equipment makes transfers possible with a minimum of adjustment.

A natural result has been the tremendous zeal of the Washington managers for the success of the program. Each understands that he plays an important part in making good for the program as a whole as well as for himself. He knows that to his sighted customers he is an ex-

ample of what a blind person really can do. The respect he gains is respect gained for all blind people. His successful management of a Washington vending stand will contribute to the future success of many thousands of potential blind stand operators throughout the country.

### Growth of An Idea

The unusual growth of the Washington Society is a real success story in agency work for the blind. Starting in 1938, with no capital assets, the society borrowed funds to finance its original program of fifteen stands. At that time it was able to offer employment to fifteen blind managers at an average annual income of \$1,500. The original loan of \$15,000 has been completely repaid. Today the society has assets of \$200,000. The number of stands has been quadrupled and the average income of the managers has more than doubled. Funds are now being set aside to expand the agency's services. A blind employment specialist now on the staff places in productive industries blind workers who can best be served in that manner. A medical clinic especially organized to care for the blind of the District of Columbia is contemplated, also a self-supporting workshop program where blind workers may learn productive crafts.

The seven-year record of the society has attracted nationwide attention and agencies in twenty-five states have sent representatives to Washington to study the plan in operation. The Washington experience indicates that in any com-



This typical vending stand financed by the Washington Society for the Blind nets its blind manager a good income



munity where as many as twelve blind persons within a radius of twenty-five miles are qualified to manage vending stand installations, a local society to finance and supervise a stand program is feasible. As an alternative, some established local agency may wish to undertake the responsibility. The state commission or council for the blind may have surveyed the area and know the number of blind persons in the community and what services are available for them.

### Basic Equipment

To initiate and direct the original program, a staff consisting of one combination general manager-supervisor and one bookkeeper-office manager should be sufficient, if aided by an interested board of directors. Twelve good stands can pay

for their equipment over a period of time, while providing adequate supervisory and central control services for their managers. After the program has retired an original loan for equipment, the stands can provide funds for additional stands or other services for the blind in the area.

Any organization planning to operate a vending stand program similar to that of the Washington Society for the Blind will profit from studying the personnel qualifications of its central staff. In five years, it has grown from two to eighteen persons, with one supervisor for every twelve stands. One staff member gives special attention to personnel problems and secures able, sighted assistants. Others give painstaking attention to the supply of good candies, tobacco, and soft drinks in adequate quantities.

Secretaries, maintenance men, supervisors, all should be selected because of a deep understanding of the problems of blind people, as well as superior ability in their particular fields. Staff members should have a keen appreciation of the social implications of their service to the blind. Each supervisor should be an unusually patient, though exacting person, who has had thorough merchandising experience in a chain store organization.

The federal Office of Vocational Rehabilitation is interested in helping any community to set up its program, and is fully prepared to give detailed technical assistance and advice. A four-week training course for supervisors of vending stand programs for state agencies is conducted regularly by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation.

# Race Relations at the Grass Roots

**Progress in the delicate, painstaking job of breaking down prejudice is described by PAUL JANS of Fellowship Center in St. Louis.**

A LITTLE MORE than two years ago, leaders of the Evangelical and Reformed Church decided to embark on a practical experiment in the improvement of race relations at the "grass roots." Through it, they hoped to arrive at a better understanding of workable methods through which to achieve the more abstract end of Christian and democratic cooperation between white and colored people. They felt that "better racial relationships are essential to the well-being of the community, but that the problem of putting this ideal into practice had not yet been approached."

The setting for that experiment has indeed been at the "grass roots" of interracial conflict. St. Louis is a border city, where meet the cultural patterns and social attitudes of North and South. Segregated schools are required by law, Negroes and whites never mix socially or for recreation except at the larger city parks. Even there, Negroes are restricted to certain picnic grounds. Within the greater city, the corner of Ninth and Tyler Streets is the center of one of the oldest sections of the city. The Mississippi River is only two blocks away.

This is an area of warehouses, trucking firms, wholesale houses, small factories, rows of run-down brick houses and flats. The juvenile delinquency rate is one of the highest of any of St. Louis' police districts. Rentals run from \$6 to \$18 per month in the white area, and slightly higher in the Negro districts. Better than 50 percent of the white residents are from rural sections of the South.

Negroes have been moving in, and each year additional flats are turned over to Negro occupancy.

Here is where the church decided to conduct its experiment. It was able to take over Fellowship Center, whose settlement house facilities had been used for the past eight years by the neighborhood's white population. A director for the center was hired and assigned the task "of organizing interracial groups as soon as possible."

This was in 1943, just before the Detroit race riots. The situation was tense. When the news of the Detroit riots broke, there were constant rumors that similar outbreaks were impending in St. Louis. The boys of the neighborhood were eagerly anticipating them. Indeed, the boys in one of our clubs proposed making sling shots for use in street warfare against Negroes as a craft project.

Six months later, these same boys were the ones who requested the center to permit Negroes to attend its weekly movie show. Today, about 25 percent of our movie audiences are Negro children. At the end of eighteen months, two Negro boys were admitted to club membership and three others were accepted as conditional members, a similar status being given to five white boys. Two of our most important clubs now are accepting Negro members. A Negro boy is a regular second baseman on the club baseball team, which plays free lance games with other North Side teams. To our knowledge, it is the only interracial team in St. Louis. The club's basket-ball team

would have included a skillful Negro athlete, if the church league in which the team is entered had allowed Negro players.

In the North, with a minimum of legal segregation, with civil rights codes, and where white and colored boys and girls are in constant contact in the schools, such progress might seem slight. But in this border city, it is acknowledged to be outstanding. What have we learned to date about the practical principles of method and procedure which work—and about those which do not?

### A Crucial Decision

The first thing we discovered was that there was little to be learned from other cities. We tried to make a study of the methods used by other agencies in similar situations. But it was soon evident that settlements and neighborhood centers in other border cities, realistically working at the problem of Negro-white relationships (as many certainly are), were not writing about it. In St. Louis, when an agency found itself in an area where Negroes were moving in, the traditional pattern was one of exclusion or segregated activities. Then, in time, the agency would move to a white community and turn the old building over to a Negro staff for work with Negro people.

Obviously, this pattern did not suit our purpose, which was to bring the colored and white residents of the neighborhood together and serve them in mixed groups. But we did not know whether such an effort would be dangerous to the



delicate neighborhood balance of Negro-white relationships. We did not know whether the people would revolt and face us with a riot situation partly of our own making.

As we studied the problem of our basic approach, we seemed to be faced with two alternatives. On the one hand, we could immediately adopt a policy of complete equality of opportunity for both races. That would mean organizing our clubs, classes, athletics, entertainments, and other activities, with a membership and attendance which had some relationship to the proportionate population of the district. On the other hand, we could start with the program of the center as it had been for the eight years before the church took over, and proceed from there. This would mean the continuance of several boys and girls clubs, a mothers club, a fathers club, and a nursery program, with an all-white membership. With this as a nucleus, we could experiment with the attempt to introduce Negroes into these and other organized activities.

Our initial inclination was toward the first approach. It seemed more in line with our concepts of Christian fellowship, democracy, and social justice. But the more we studied the practical aspects of our problem, the more we veered toward the second course. We finally adopted it for two main reasons:

The first was quite practical and opportunistic. Our resources in building equipment, staff, and budget were limited. We had inherited a club membership from the white community alone that

would tax those resources. An avowed policy to serve equally both white and colored presented obvious administrative difficulties. The community would expect the sponsors of the new agency not only to continue these activities, but to provide for many more. A practical crisis in our relationship to the community might well develop.

The second reason was more fundamental. We came to the often stated conclusion that intrinsically the Negro problem is not a Negro problem but a white problem. The essence of its solution is the interpretation of the true Negro to the prejudiced white person, in terms of common humanity.

### Boring from Within

There was plenty of experience which showed the unwisdom of trying to convince, all at once, the majority of any population segment that both races could and should work together in harmony. Such a mass educational effort merely gives reactionary groups advance warning to organize against it. The appeal to democratic rights, the Constitution, Christian ethics, is effective only when a majority of the group to which the appeal is made have reached a stage of social conscience where these concepts have intimate and personal meaning. Certainly, they had little meaning to one typical white youngster in the center. He objected strenuously to the introduction of Negroes to the building on the ground that this meant "the center would welcome Hitler if he came to St. Louis. There is no difference between Nazis

and Negroes." The neighborhood as whole, we felt, was hardly better conditioned to accept them.

It seemed sound, therefore, to begin with the center as it actually was, white agency concerned with the problem of the neighborhood, one of which should be the establishment of harmonious relationships between the races. We would seek to be the guide and spokesman of the white group. A test of our educational leadership would be their ultimate willingness to open the center's doors to Negro members.

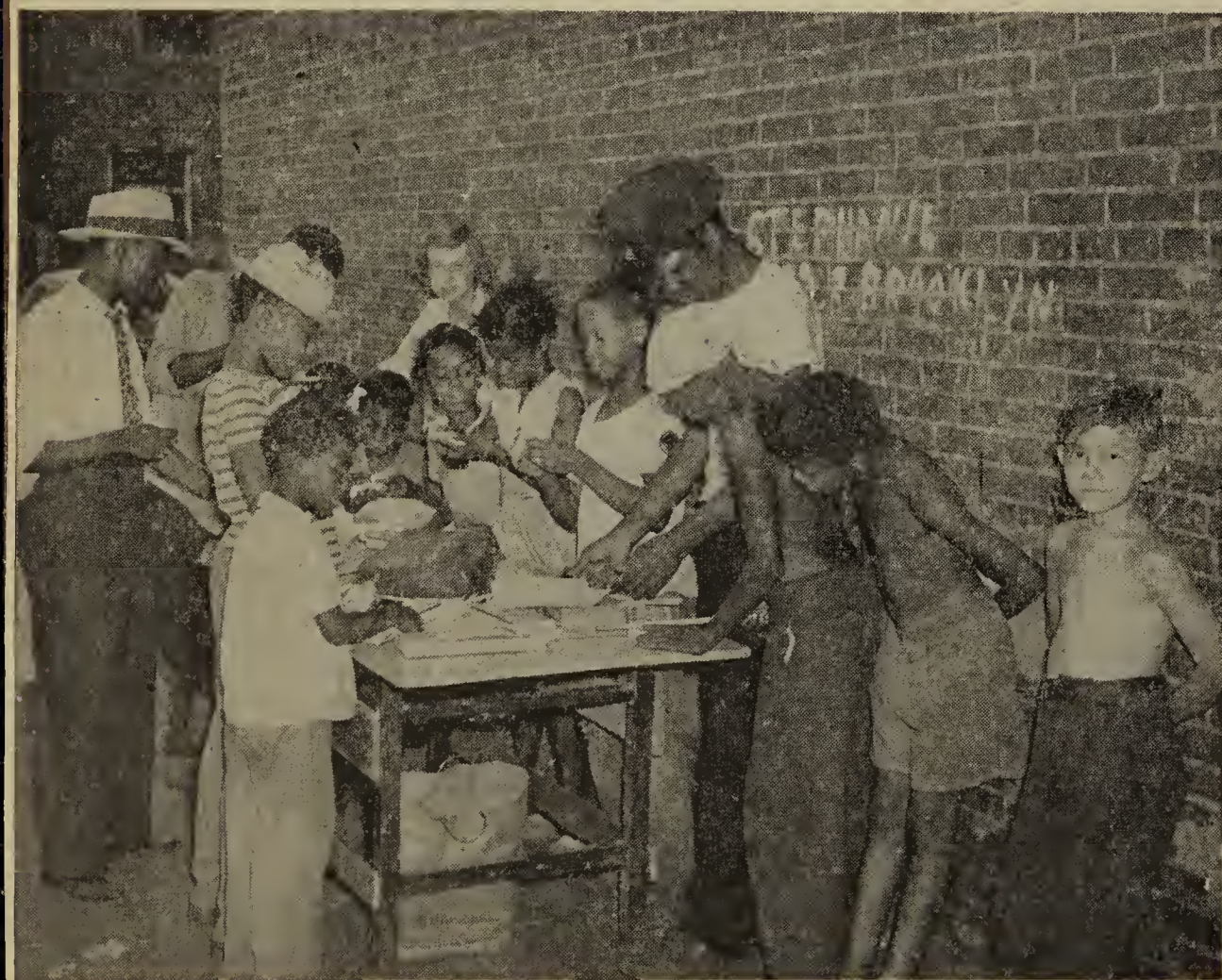
Once this basic point of departure was clarified and accepted as an agency policy, the next steps were to experiment with ways and means and try to deduce working principles from our experience. Here we have come to some rather surprising conclusions.

The first is that the use of the group, as such, as a means of interracial education, is not the first step in breaking down community prejudice. That is, one should not tackle, head on, the problem of introducing Negroes into existing white clubs. One should deal first, individually and indirectly, with the leaders of the group or gang.

For example, we first approached the leaders and potential leaders of several neighborhood gangs and tried to convince them of the foolishness of street fighting with Negro gangs. We offered them opportunities for other activities—baseball, basket-ball, boxing and, later on, various craft projects. In these ways, we weakened the solidarity of their interest in spending time combating Negroes. The next step was to talk with each individual in the group and sound out his reaction toward Negroes in general and toward particular Negroes that he knew. The results of these interviews were systematically recorded, and gradually the whole question was naturally and formally introduced into the group's discussions. The ultimate purpose, with results already indicated, was to bring the group to a point where it would, of its own volition, invite individual Negroes into the club membership.

### Good "Bad" Boys

A second conclusion may seem even more surprising. It was not the "good" boys who were most open-minded. On the contrary, it was the "bad" boys. Initially in our talks, we approached the boys who were active members of churches or Sunday schools. We supposed that they would be better prepared for such discussions. We also expected a better response because of their lesser hostility towards adults and our belief that they would therefore be more inclined to listen to adult opinion. How wrong that



Youngsters work together on crafts in the backyard of Fellowship Center



HV1711

c.2

M

Myers, Dorice M.

No more tin cups for the blind.

Date Due			

**Bno-Dart**

INDUSTRIES

NEWARK 14, N. J. • Los Angeles 25, Calif.  
Toronto 28, Ontario Made in U. S. A.

